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PRINCE EUGENE OF SWEDEN. A PAINTER'S BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

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This article tells about the main stages of the biography of the famous Scandinavian painter Prince Eugene, a representative of the Bernadotte dynasty, who left a noticeable mark on the history of Swedish culture. Having no prospects of ever taking the royal throne, Eugene, after receiving the traditional upbringing and education for the heir to the throne, devoted himself to the study of painting. Having experienced the serious influence of the French Impressionist masters of the last third of the 19th century during his studies in Paris, he worked fruitfully in various genres for a long time, leaving an extensive creative legacy: his brush owns not only numerous canvases presented both in leading museums in Sweden and world-class collections (the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum), but also monuments of monumental painting — in particular, frescoes in the Stockholm City Hall and the Royal Drama Theater. The activity of Prince Eugene as a representative of the Swedish royal court during the period on the eve of the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union is a significant research interest. Prince Eugene made certain efforts to preserve the unity of Sweden and Norway by popularizing such ideas in the Norwegian creative environment, where he had wide acquaintances and a certain popularity and was even proposed by such famous figures of Norwegian culture as K. Hamsun and B. Bjornson as a possible candidate for the role of king of Norway. The prince-artist is also noteworthy as a public figure who held anti-Nazi positions during the period before and during World War II: he not only condemned the policies of the Third Reich, but also criticized Swedish public figures who expressed sympathy for the actions of the Nazi regime in Germany. Nowadays, the extensive creative heritage of Prince Eugene is on display in the collection of the art museum located in his estate Waldemarsudde in Stockholm, where he lived and worked for most of his life and where he was buried after his death.

Keywords: Swedish-Norwegian Union, history of Swedish culture, Swedish painting, Prince Eugene, Waldemarsudde.

Due to the political events of the 20th century most of the European countries are not monarchies anymore. Surprisingly in Scandinavia, for several decades known as a region of social democratic views, the monarchy retains a strong position. These days the Bernadotte dynasty ruling in Sweden has set two peculiar records: this family has not only held the throne for more than two centuries but also retains the title of Swedish monarchs longer than other ruling houses in Swedish history. Despite two centuries of avoiding war and armed conflict king Carl XVI Gustav regularly appears in public in military uniform. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a European monarch or crown prince who not related to the army: this power is rooted in the distant past of tradition. Of course, members of the royal houses receive a versatile education. Often enough the representatives of royal dynasties successfully realizing themselves in the field of art. However, it is not easy to meet a successful artist in the ruling royal family. That's why it is interesting to take a closer look at the biography and work of Prince Eugene of Sweden — a major artist and art collector of the first half of the 20th century, who left a mark on the history of Swedish culture. The research literature in Swedish contains a number of major scientific and popular works dedicated to Prince Eugene. Unfortunately, these works are not available in Russian. Thus, this article is the first attempt to fill this gap in Russian historiography in the form of a brief historical and biographical essay dealing with the main stages in the life of this remarkable person.

Prince Eugene Napoleon Nicholas of Sweden, the fourth and youngest son of Prince Oscar, Duke of Östergötaland, and Princess Sophia of Nassau, was born in Drottningholm Palace near Stockholm in 1865. At birth he received the title of Duke of Nerke. When his father ascended the thrones of Sweden and Norway (united in a union then) and began to rule under the name of Oscar II, Prince Eugene became the fourth in line to the throne. The young man early showed inclinations towards painting. Having no prospects of ever taking the royal throne, the prince got the opportunity to engage in artistic activities. After graduating from a privileged school he received traditional military training but also studied the history of painting at Uppsala University [Scott, 2011, p.212].

His first artistic mentors were the Norwegian painter H. Gyde and the Swedish artist W. von Gegerfelt [Wennerholm, 1982, s. 25–27]. From 1887 to 1889, Eugene studied painting in Paris with such masters as

L. Bonnat, A. Rolle, A. Gervais and P. Puvis de Chavans. It is possible that the work of the symbolist Puvis de Chavannes had a significant influence on the artistic style of Prince Eugene [Widman, 1995, s. 38]. Over the next few years, the artist gradually decided to refuse military service and devote himself to painting. His first successful works “The Old Castle” (1883), “Spring” (1891), “When the Forest Thins” (1892) — are presented in the National Museum in Stockholm. Most of the works done in a style close to impressionism [Wennerholm, 1982, s. 35–36]. Prince Eugene painted landscapes of Södermanland, the surroundings of Stockholm and Lake Mälaren, as well as the areas where he lived in the summer — Tyresö south of Stockholm, Örgården in Västra Götaland; Esterlen in Skåne added to them several years later. In 1898, Duke of Nerke obtained his father’s permission for military retirement and gradually became one of the most remarkable Swedish landscape painters of his era. Speaking about his contemporaries belonging to any royal families it is not easy to find equally artistically gifted people. In the highest European aristocracy fine arts were rather popular but mostly like hobby. Perhaps only the younger sister of Nicholas II, Olga Alexandrovna, can be placed near with Prince Eugene as a professional painter: her artworks attracted the attention of private collectors and large museum collections [Vorres, 2001, p. 48–52].

King Oscar II’s decision did not cancel the fact that Eugene remained a prince with court obligations. He became the official representative of the Swedish royal house at the funeral of Alexander III in St Petersburg [Weibull, 1985, s. 85]. At the same time as a Norwegian Prince Eugene regularly appeared in Christiania (modern Oslo), and made trips around the country. Of course, the prince was busy not only studying the natural beauties of Norway. The relations with Norway during the reign of King Oscar II had great influence on political life in Sweden, and more than once it seemed as if the union between the two countries was on the point of ending. The dissensions chiefly had their origin in the demand by Norway for separate consuls and eventually a separate foreign service. Norway had, according to the revised constitution of 1814, the right to separate consular offices, but had not exercised that right partly for financial reasons, partly because the consuls appointed by the Swedish foreign office generally did a satisfactory job of representing Norway. During the late 19th century, however, Norway’s merchant marine grew rapidly to become one of the world’s largest, and one of the most

important factors of the national economy. It was increasingly felt that Norway needed separate consuls who could assist shipping and national interests abroad. Partly, the demand for separate consuls also became a symbolic one, a way to assert the growing disillusionment with the Union. It is known that Prince Eugene had extensive acquaintances in the creative circles of Norway. The painter was especially active interacting with the Norwegian artists E. Verensjold and G. Munthe and kept in touch with them until his death [Barton, 2003, p. 200–202].

Presumably, this side of Prince Eugene's activity can be described as "soft power". Despite all the efforts the Swedish-Norwegian union ceased to exist in 1905. Remarkably that a number of prominent Norwegian cultural figures (for example, B. Bjornson and K. Hamsun) proposed Prince Eugene as candidates for the Norwegian crown [Wennerholm, 1982, s. 64–65]. It seems Prince Eugene achieved certain successes in attracting sympathy from the Norwegian cultural community.

The same period Prince Eugene found himself in a rather difficult situation as a painter and as a representative of the ruling house in Sweden. In 1887, in Stockholm had set up an informal public association of figures of fine arts named the Swedish Union of Artists [Kjellberg, 2017, s. 36–38]. Like the Wanderers in Russia, the new artistic union actively opposed itself to the official Academy of Arts. Due to his origin and undoubted creative merits Eugene was an honorary member of the Academy of Arts. However, his sympathies were rather on the side of the unofficial art movement. The situation with "belonging" to the circles of opponents of the Academy of Arts and at the same time participation in the exhibitions of the Academy itself did not suit the other side. K. Nurdström, a member of the Union of Artists wrote: "Prince Eugene must one day choose between being either a prince or an artist" [Brummer, 1998, s. 395–399]. Probably, the prince adhered to both more restrained and more democratic views: subsequently he continued to combine his official status with painting. The status of the duke and court duties did not prevent him from spending his leisure time in the company of a prominent member of the Social Democratic Labor Party of Sweden, the future prime minister of the kingdom P.-A. Hansson and other well-known republicans opposed the preservation of the monarchy in the country [Weibull, 1985, s. 90].

Eugene's creative interests were not limited with landscapes. His creative heritage can also be traced through monumental painting. Among

other things he completed the frescoes “City on the Water” (1917–1922) in the Stockholm City Hall, “White Night” (1899) and “Summer” (1904) in the Norra Latin and Estra Real gymnasiums in Stockholm, frescoes in the Royal drama theater, Stockholm court and the University of Stockholm, also the altar of the church in Kiruna [Scott, 2011, p. 215].

In the later periods of his life Prince Eugene continued to take part in the socio-political sphere. In 1933, in one of his letters he wrote about the National Socialist regime in Germany: “I don’t like it. I am simply disgusted by the mentality that it expresses and will never agree that it is driven by necessity. I will no longer look for justifications and explanations for acts of violence and injustice. The lion’s share of what I accused the Germans of during the last war — cruelty, servility and an ugly habit of threatening and intimidating — the present-day Germany has unambiguously confirmed” [Scott, 2011, p. 208]. In 1936, the German pacifist and anti-fascist K. von Ossietzky, a concentration camp prisoner, had awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. After that the Nazis legally forbade German citizens to accept Nobel Prizes. The Swedish traveler and once prominent public person S. Hedin, known for his Germanophilism and sympathy for the Third Reich, defended this decision. Prince Eugene wrote him an open letter saying: “I was always surprised that you, such a great Swedish patriot, are often very condescending and look for extenuating circumstances when Germany acts defiantly and insultingly towards us” [Scott, 2011, p. 208].

Eugene’s position did not change as the crisis in international relations developed on the eve of a new war in Europe. In 1943, at the height of the Second World War, when Sweden, while maintaining formal neutrality, was nevertheless in active economic and political cooperation with Germany, Prince Eugene found it necessary to come to a charity concert in favor of Jewish refugee children at the Royal Opera in Stockholm in the company of Chief Rabbi of Sweden M. Ehrenpreis. This prompted a negative statement from the German Foreign Office which stated: “The Swedish royal court appears to be under strong Jewish influence” [Scott, 2011, p. 209]. Probably Eugene also faced criticism from his elder brother — King Gustav V, known for his pro-German views. During the autumn of 1941, Gustav V wrote a secret letter to A. Hitler: “My dear Reich Chancellor! I have a need to write to you openly on an issue that worries me and is of the greatest importance for me and my country. This is a Russian question. I believe it is of great importance for

the future, and you can learn about my view from its essence. Already after the Great War I saw a huge danger Bolshevism carries not only for us, in Scandinavia, but for the whole of Europe. Therefore, I want to express my warm gratitude for the fact that you decided to destroy this plague in every possible way. I congratulate you on the great success already achieved. I have to ask you that this letter not made public, at least while the war is going on (for that would weaken my position and make it difficult for me to work towards maintaining good relations with Germany). However, you can be sure that I will do my best to maintain the good relations between us. With kind wishes, I remain devoted to you, Gustav" [Thorsell, 2007, p. 7].

While perceiving such a passage a number of circumstances should be taken into account. By the middle of the 20th century the Swedish monarchy had been predominantly representative for almost a century and a half, and the kings did not have full-fledged political power. Sweden's government adhered to neutrality and, of course, did not support such opinions. We should not forget about the advanced age of the Swedish monarch — at the time of writing this provocative letter, Gustav V was more than 80 years old. The aged king's opinion cannot be accepted as the prevailed one in Swedish society.

The name of the painter is inextricably linked with the estate of Valdemarsudde (Swedish: Waldemarsudde) on Djurgården Island in Stockholm, which he bought in 1899 and where in 1904 he built his country residence in the Art Nouveau style according to the design of the architect F. Boberg [Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde]. Valdemarsudde became the place where the artist drew inspiration and worked hard. The prince who had no family and children bequeathed the house and his collection of works of art to Sweden. Now it's place for a museum. It includes the prince's apartment and an extensive collection of paintings showing the evolution of Swedish painting in the 19th and 20th centuries. The collection also includes about 3,000 paintings and graphic works painted by Prince Eugene [Widman, 1995, s. 96]. Also Prince Eugene's works are available to the attention of the audience in the main art collections of the kingdom — the National Museum in Stockholm and the Art Museum in Gothenburg, as well as in more than 20 regional museum collections. The artist's works were included in the collections of such major centers as the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art [British Museum; Metropolitan Museum]. In 1945, on the

day of the prince's eightieth birthday, the Prince Eugene Medal had been established. It is awarded for high artistic achievements in the field of architecture, painting and sculpture. [Brummer, 1998, s. 84]. In 2005, in commemoration of the centenary of the peaceful denounce of the Swedish-Norwegian union of 1814–1905, a special prize in honor of the Prince Eugene was established. It is awarded to Swedish and Norwegian artists for strengthening cultural ties between the two kingdoms [Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde].

In 1947, Prince Eugene fell ill with pneumonia and died shortly after his 82nd birthday. He became the first member of the Bernadotte family who was cremated after his death [Brummer, 1998, s. 121]. He was buried in his estate Waldemarsudde [Widman, 1995, s. 105], where he spent a significant part of his life devoted to landscape painting. In 1965, the Swedish critic and artist T. Bergsmark assessed his heritage: “Many of his paintings became classics, symbols of the Swedish perception of nature and national self-awareness. This must be due to his ability to get used to and identify himself with these fragments of nature and, at the same time, his refined sensuality, so clearly expressed in him. It is this sensuality that breathes life into small and significant works” [Scott, 2011, p. 216].

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ПРИНЦ-ХУДОЖНИК: СТРАНИЦЫ ЖИЗНИ ЕВГЕНИЯ ШВЕДСКОГО

Для цитирования: *Gekht A. Prince Eugene of Sweden. A painter's brief biography // Скандинавская филология. 2022. Т. 20. Вып. 2. С. 402–410.*
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Настоящая статья посвящена рассмотрению основных этапов биографии известного скандинавского живописца принца Евгения — представителя династии Бернадотов, оставившего заметный след в истории шведской культуры. Не имея перспектив когда-либо занять королевский трон, Евгений, получив традиционное для наследника трона воспитание и образование, посвятил себя изучению живописи. Испытав на себе в ходе обучения в Париже серьезное влияние французских мастеров-импрессионистов последней трети XIX столетия, он долгое время плодотворно работал в различных жанрах, оставив обширное творческое наследие: его кисти принадлежат не только многочисленные полотна, представленные как в ведущих музеях Швеции, так и в собраниях мирового уровня (Британский музей, Метрополитен-музей), но и памятники монументальной живописи — в частности фрески в ратуше Стокгольма и королевском Драматическом театре. Вызывает интерес деятельность принца Евгения как представителя шведского королевского двора — в частности в период накануне расторжения шведско-норвежской унии принц Евгений прикладывал определенные усилия по сохранению единства Швеции и Норвегии за счет популяризации подобных идей в норвежской творческой среде, где он обладал широкими знакомствами и определенной популярностью и даже предлагался такими известными деятелями норвежской культуры, как К. Гамсун и Б. Бьёрнсон, как возможный кандидат на роль короля Норвегии. Примечателен принц-художник и как общественный деятель, занимавший антинацистские позиции в период накануне и во время Второй мировой войны: он не только выступал с осуждением политики Третьего рейха, но и подвергал критике шведских общественных деятелей, высказывавших симпатии в отношении действий нацистского режима в Германии. В наши дни обширное творческое наследие принца Евгения выставлено в собрании художественного музея, расположенного в его усадьбе Вальдемарсудд в Стокгольме, где он жил и работал на протяжении большей части своей жизни и где был захоронен после кончины.

Ключевые слова: Шведско-норвежская уния, история шведской культуры, шведская живопись, принц Евгений, Вальдемарсудд.

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